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Essay on Shakespeare's
character of Shylock

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AN ESSAY

Louis Pocock

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTER OF SHYLOCK,

ORIGINATING

IN AN EXAMINATION OF THE LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF MOSES, AND
OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS, WITH REFERENCE TO
ENUMERATIONS OF POPULATION, AND THE
RATE OF INTEREST OF MONEY.

By GEORGE FARREN,

Resident Director of the Asylum Life Office.

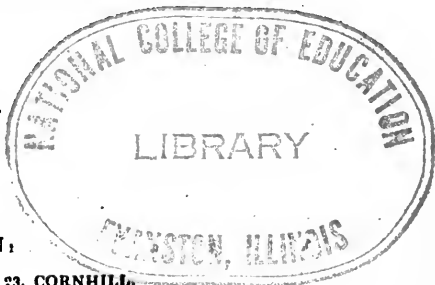
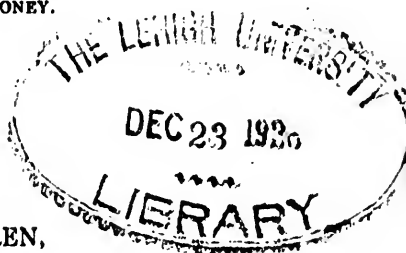
AUTHOR OF "OBSERVATIONS ON THE LAWS OF MORTALITY AND DISEASE AND ON
THE PRINCIPLES OF LIFE INSURANCE, WITH ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PROGRESS
OF MANIA, AS DISPLAYED IN THE CHARACTERS OF LEAR, EDOAR, HAMLET,
AND OPHELIA."

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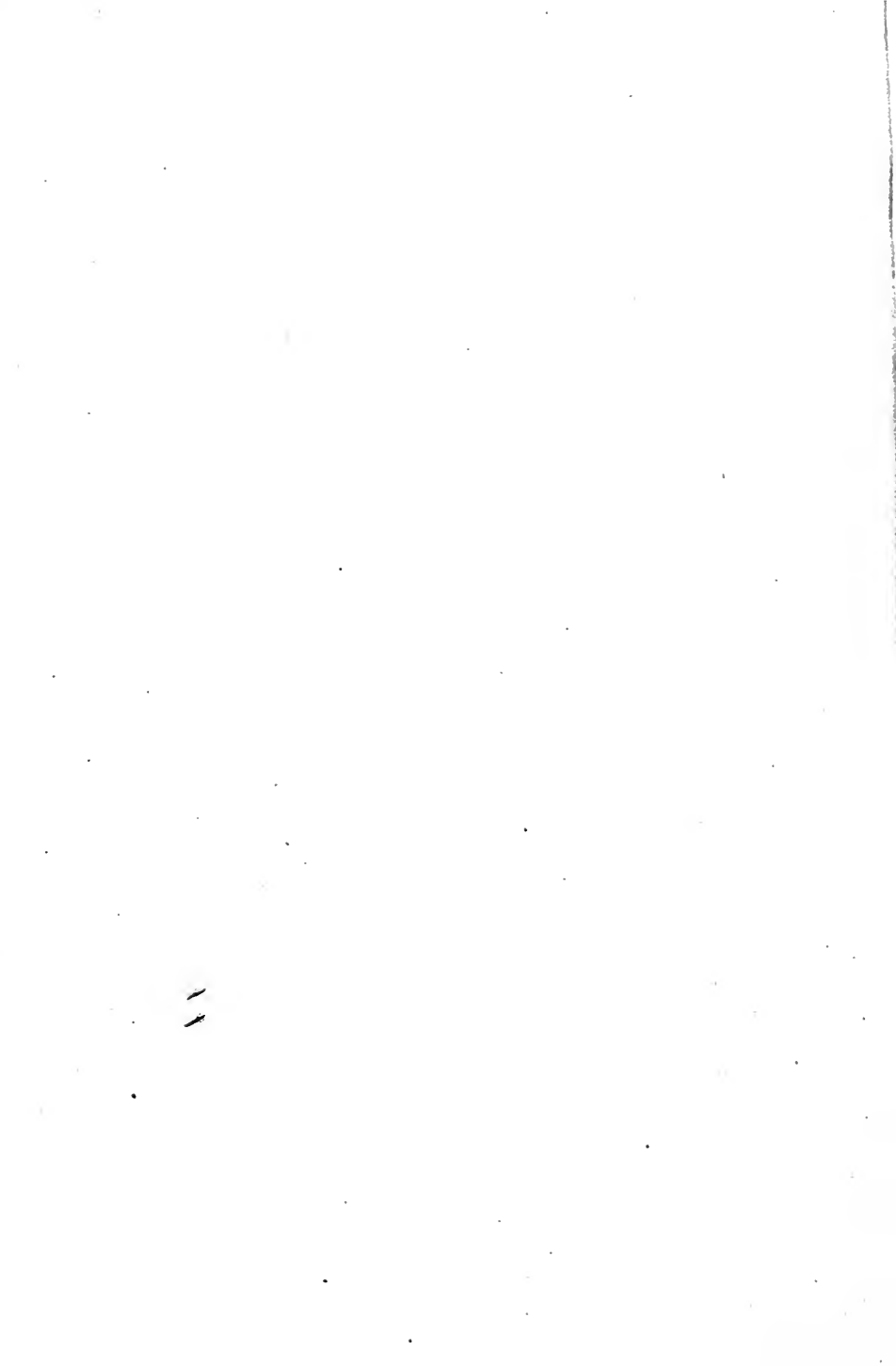
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INTRODUCTION.

To those who are acquainted with the pursuits of the Author of the following Essay, it cannot be unknown that the two essential elements of a system of Life Assurance are—The probable duration, or more correctly speaking, the *expectation* of human existence: and—a defined rate of the breed of money commonly called interest.

For the former—recourse must be had to various enumerations of population, with the relative lists of burial; and for the latter—to the fluctuations in the value of money, influenced by fiscal regulations affecting the precious metals, and by the laws relating to interest.

Now the earliest enumerations and classifications of population are those recorded in Exodus, xxx. 12, 13, 14; Leviticus, xxvi, 3; Numbers, i.—iv. and xxvi. and II Samuel, xxiv. Some of these

books also speak of interest of money; and in the course of a minute examination, on these points, of the laws and customs of Moses, as well as of those propounded for the primitive Christians, the Author was forcibly struck by the recollection of certain passages in Shakespeare which seemed to him to have been derived from sacred sources.

These labours and recollections originated the idea of an Essay on the character of Shylock; and as the Author's former publications on the varieties in *Mania*, illustrated in Lear, Edgar, Hamlet, and Ophelia, were favourably received by numerous readers, he has been induced to submit the present paper also for public opinion.

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SHYLOCK.

ACT I. SCENE III.

OF the many splendid Essays on the vices and frailties springing from human passions, which Shakespeare has furnished in the course of his plays, the character of Shylock, in the Merchant of Venice, may be considered as the masterpiece. It has been truly said, that [“His language, allusions, and ideas, are every where so appropriate to a Jew, that Shylock might be exhibited for an exemplar of that peculiar people.”]—Still the reader of the play will not find his expectation of superior pleasure realized, by witnessing its performance on the stage.—[For the last fifty years, Shylock has been portrayed as a Being of coarse manners, servile habits, and most vindictive temper; penurious in his ways, griping in his dealings, unjust in his practices, and so ferocious in his nature, as to be devoid of those common feelings of tenderness towards kindred, with which even the brute Creation are generally

endowed. From his first entrance to his final exit, he has been exhibited in one continuous state of snappish acerbity, whether in intercourse with Bassanio, Antonio, his Daughter, his Servant, or his Friend.—Nay, he has been divested of even the negative merit of superior cunning, by being made to propose the forfeiture of a pound of Christian flesh, in a manner so seriously earnest and vindictive towards Antonio, as must have immediately defeated his own object, by at once exposing to his intended victim the malice and cruelty of his secret intentions. It remains to be considered, whether “*this is the Jew, which Shakespeare drew,*” and intended to offer as an exemplar of a whole people; or whether the picture has not derived its colouring from the prejudices of those, who, like the sculptor in the fable, put the Man astride the Lion, as conclusive evidence of superior strength, without reflecting, that if a lion had carved the work, he would have put the lion upon the man.]

From such a being as the Shylock of the last half century, every man would have turned with disgust and horror, and Bassanio instead of courting his assistance, would have paid an extra rate of interest to any of the other usurers with which Venice then abounded, rather than have come in contact with a reptile so openly repulsive, vindictive, and unnatural. In short, the many eminent Actors who have personated Shylock, seem never

to have taken the trouble to look into the motives, the allusions, the passions, and the prejudices, which form the mainsprings of the character.

It may here be useful to refer to the sources from which it is supposed Shakespeare drew the leading incident of his play.—One commentator has pointed to a story in the Pecorone of Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, a novelist, who wrote in 1378—another, to a persian manuscript; in both of which a Jew is made the insatiable creditor; but it is scarcely probable that Shakespeare had recourse to either of these far-fetched authorities, when the following anecdote is related to have passed in his own time, and almost under his own observation.—It should be premised that those who have made it their business to ascertain the order in which Shakespeare's plays were written, have dated the Merchant of Venice in 1594.

In 1585, Queen Elizabeth's Admiral, Francis Drake, made himself master of St. Domingo; and the first report of that event which reached Rome is said to have been conveyed in a private letter to Paul Secchi, a Christian merchant in that city, who finding it to his interest to have the report believed as true communicated it to Sampson Ceneda, a Jew usurer, who however, for purposes of his own, threw discredit on the story, and pretended to disbelieve it; whereupon the Christian, half in sport and half in passion, said, 'I'll willingly pay you a thousand crowns, if it be

false, provided you will let me cut off a pound of your Jew's-flesh if it prove *true*; } Intending, as it is said, to cut it from "that *part* of his body which it is not necessary to mention." — The Jew accepted the wager, and articles were signed. The report proving true, the Christian revelled in the joke of *nicking* the Jew in his most fleshy part. However, the matter coming to the ears of Pope Sixtus V. he summoned the parties before him, and said, "When contracts are made, it is just they should be fulfilled, as we intend this shall. Take a knife therefore, Secchi, and cut a pound of flesh from any part you please of the Jew's body: we should advise you however to be careful; for if you cut but a scruple or grain more or less than your due, you shall certainly be hanged." — The merchant at these words became very much alarmed, and protested it was far from his thoughts to insist on a performance of the contract, which he requested might be destroyed. Sixtus then asked each whether he was *content*, and on being answered "Yes," replied, "But we are not content, nor is there sufficient satisfaction made to our laws: we desire to know what authority you have to lay such wagers? The subjects of Princes are the property of the State, and have no right to dispose of their bodies, nor any part of them, without the express consent of their Sovereign." He accordingly condemned them both to death,

the Jew for selling his life, which he said was suicide, and the Merchant for the premeditated murder of the Jew.

Sixtus, however, who did not really design to put them to death, but to deter others from such practices, ultimately released both, after making each pay 2000 crowns to an hospital.

[Those who have read the Merchant of Venice with attention, cannot fail to admire the consummate skill with which Shakespeare has adapted the above-related incident, to meet and flatter a popular prejudice, by making the Malignant a Jew instead of a Christian, whilst he excites deep sympathy for the Christian debtor by involving his life in the mesh weaved by the superior artifice of his Jewish creditor, who under cloak of an act of liberality in a *sportive merry mood*, and in compliance with the forms and customs of loans, which require *some* penalty to be named in a bond, veils the malicious purpose of "feeding fat," an ancient grudge in case the least default should be made on the day fixed for payment. This is one of the many points, on which the poet has seized with admirable dexterity, but whose intentions appear to have been altogether misunderstood, or misrepresented, by those who have personated Shylock on the stage.

[Shakespeare's character of Shylock impresses the reader with the notion of a Jew of advanced age, of great wealth and pecuniary consequence in

Venice, bearing "with patient shrug" the scoffs and indignities heaped upon him by the enemies of his sacred nation,—a man, who in addition to the wrongs which he suffers in common with his tribe, has been personally spit upon, kicked, and called the most opprobrious names by the Christian merchant, Antonio, who he says "has disgraced him and hindered him of half a million, laughed at his losses, mocked at his gains, scorned his nation, thwarted his bargains, cooled his friends, heated his enemies, and he asks—"What is his reason?"

"I am a Jew!"

"Hath not a Jew eyes?—hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, *passions*? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not *revenge*? If we are like you in the rest we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility?—*revenge*! If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be, by Christian *example*? why, *revenge*!"

Under this sense of feeling, Shylock, a complete enthusiast in his religious opinions, is applied to, by Bassanio, for the loan of three thousand ducats, on security of the bond of the very Antonio from whom Shylock has suffered so much indignity; and who he says, like a low fool, lends out money gratis, thereby courting vulgar popularity, by seeking to bring down the *rate of usance* in Venice,—and

calling every Jew an *Usurer* who shall make money breed by interest.

In his practice of "lending on advantage," as in every other of his acts, Shylock thinks himself fully justified by the express law of Moses, whose command it is a matter of conscience with him implicitly to obey, as will be manifested by what he says and does, throughout the play. The command is, "Unto a *stranger*, thou mayest lend upon usury, but unto thy *brother*, thou shalt not lend upon usury; that the Lord thy God may *bless* thee, in all thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it." Shylock will lend to Tubal, and Tubal to Shylock, without interest, because they are brothers, of the same tribe; but a Christian is the stranger who is not to be put on the same footing as one of the sacred nation.

[The first entrance of Shylock, is marked by consummate skill, and his introductory speeches fully develope his purpose to the audience. He enters, making Bassanio reiterate his proposals,—not that Shylock had forgotten them, but that he wants confirmation of what he can scarcely bring himself to believe.

Shylock. Three thousand ducats—Well!

Bassanio. Ay, sir; for three months.

Shylock. For three months—Well!

Bassanio. For the which, as *I told you*, Antonio shall be bound.

Shylock. ANTONIO shall become *bound*—*Well!!!*

As much as to say, '*that* is the music for *my* ear, which I was leading you to *repeat*.—It is ANTONIO shall become BOUND, and to *me*,—It is WELL, i'faith! and as I originally understood it.'

Bassanio. May you stead me? Will you pleasure me? Shall I know your answer?

Then Shylock, who has instantly determined to lend the money at all events, provided Antonio will put himself even within reach "of his danger," by signing a bond, turns round to Bassanio, and to make assurance doubly sure, and to prevent the possibility of retraction or mistake, repeats—

Three thousand ducats—for three months—and ANTONIO BOUND!

Bassanio. Your answer to that.

Having determined to lend the money, but fearing to show himself too eager, Shylock now coquets, and begins to question the security.

Shylock. Antonio is a *good* man.

Bassanio. Have you heard any imputation to the contrary?

Shylock. Ho no, no, no, no: my meaning in saying he is a *good* man, is to have you understand me that he is *sufficient*.

That is—that he is a *solvent* man; and Shylock immediately goes on to show that although the *man*, as he calls him, is *sufficient*, still, that his means are in supposition, and most improvidently,

or as he would say prodigally, *squandered* all over the world: a fact proved by the result, as Antonio suddenly loses all his property as if by magic. He concludes the speech, which is replete with the cunning of a man well versed in bargain-making, by saying:

I think I *may* take his bond.—

The coquetry of which is admirable, and only to be exceeded by the contemptuous chuckle with which he replies to Bassanio's "Be *assured* you may," by saying,

I will be assured I may. May I *speak* with Antonio?

Bassanio. If it please you to *dine* with us.

Shylock. Yes, to smell pork!—to eat of the habitation which your *PROPHET* the NAZARITE *conjured* the devil into: I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you. What news on the Rialto?—Who is he comes here?

This last speech is certainly one of the finest bursts in the play; and seems to have been altogether misunderstood by the actors, who have, uniformly, uttered it with solemnity, as if Jews were deterred from eating pork by a belief in the fact of Jesus having driven the devils into the herd of swine, as related in the eighth chapter of St. Luke: whereas, it is expressly commanded by the 11th of Leviticus, v. 7, that the flesh of the swine is unclean and not to be eaten, and Shylock

intends to cast ridicule both on the Prophet and the relation of what passed in the country of the Gadarenes, over against Galilee.

The Christian reader must do Shakespeare the justice to remember that he is sketching the *belief*, the character, and conduct of a *Jew*. Indeed, the spirit of the Israelite shines through every word: "Yes, to *smell* PORK!" as a man would say, ironically, 'Of course I shall do that! You would like nothing better than to subject me to such a discipline, that you might enjoy the fun, as boys do the miseries of a dog whom they have tortured by a kettle tied to his tail;—oh, yes! of course, a true believer of my experience will dine with you, To smell pork; to *eat* of the habitation into which the devil was conjured by your PROPHET, the NAZARITE, (the Lord help us, such a *prophet*, made out of a thing unworthy to be a priest, because he is not a Levite, and one who severs himself from the tribes, and mortifies his appetites by pretending devotion, merely to bring himself within the scope of a peculiar law, that he may avoid going to war, and performing other duties) Of course, I say, I shall dine with you, to be amused by a relation of the bit of conjuring practised by your Nazarite Prophet with Legion and the herd of swine.'

That this contempt, not only of a Nazarite, but of a Nazarene, existed among the Jews, is clear, from the 4th verse of the 1st chapter of St. John,

“And Nathaniel said unto him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” And again from Acts, xxiv. v. 5, in which Tertullus accusing St. Paul before Felix, says, “For we have found this man a pestilent fellow and a mover of sedition among the Jews, throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” Shylock then adds,—I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following; but it excites my contempt, even to laughter, for you to suppose that one of God’s chosen people would attend your unclean orgies, for no better object than the *pleasure of speaking with Antonio*. Come, let us change the subject. “What news on the Rialto? Who is he comes here?”

Bassanio. This is Signior Antonio.

Shylock. (aside.) How like, a fawning publican, he looks!
I hate him, for he is a *Christian*,
But *more* for that, in low simplicity,
He lends out money *gratis*, and brings down
The *rate* of usance here with us in Venice.
If I can catch him on the hip,
I’ll feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.

The next enthusiastic burst, which marks the pride of the descendant of Jacob, will be found in the following:—

Shylock. Methought you said you neither lend nor borrow upon advantage.

Antonio.—I do never use it.

Shylock. When Jacob grazed his uncle Laban’s sheep.
This Jacob from our holy Abraham was,

(As his *wise mother* WROUGHT IN HIS BEHALF.)

The *third* possessor. AY, HE WAS THE THIRD.

Again the actors have misunderstood one of the finest allusions in the play. The reader will remember the part taken by Rebecca, the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob, to obtain his father's blessing for him, in preference to Esau, the elder son (Genesis, chap. xxvii.) It was by this act of hers that Jacob *became* the *third* possessor; and for this deceit, Shylock thinks her entitled to great praise, not only as it shewed the superior cunning of the woman on behalf of her favorite son, but as it was the means through which the greatness of the Israelites was accomplished, for it drove Jacob to Laban, and from Jacob the whole of the tribes were descended. Shylock therefore says with great exultation, "Aye, he was the third," whereas the actors have uttered the line as if Shylock doubted whether Jacob were the third, or a subsequent possessor,—a point of genealogy, not only thoroughly well known to Shylock, but to every Jew who has lived from the time of Jacob to the present hour. The justification of taking breed of metal, under the name of interest, follows, by Shylock's referring to what passed with Laban, as recorded in Genesis, chap. xxx. and he concludes a speech of exquisite subtlety by saying,

This thrift is blessing, if men steal it not.

alluding to the commandment first quoted, which speaks of laying *usury* on a stranger, and says, "That God may *bless* thee in all thou settest thine hand to, in the land whither thou goest to possess it."

Antonio. Was this inserted to make *interest* good,—
Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?

Shylock, I cannot tell.—I make them *breed* as fast.

Shylock being now satisfied of the serious purpose of the parties to borrow from him, and that the *terms* alone remain to be discussed, determines to tell the Christian a little of his mind; and accordingly, in answer to Antonio's—

Well, Shylock—shall we be beholden to you?
says—

Signor Antonio, many a time, and oft
On the Rialto, have you rated me
About my monies and my *usances*:
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug—
For *sufferance* is the *badge* of all our *tribe*.
You call me—*Misbeliever*—*Cut-throat*—*Dog*,
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine:
And all for use of that which is mine own.—
Well then, it now appears *you need my help!*
Go to then: you come to me, and you say
Shylock, we would have monies:—you say so,
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard,
And foot me as you spurn a stranger *cur*
Across your threshold: monies is your suit—
What should I say to you? should I not say
Hath a *Dog* money? Is it possible
A *Cur* can lend three thousand ducats? or,

Shall I bend low, and in a *bondsman's* key
 With 'bated breath, and whispering humbleness
 Say this—
 Fair sir, you *spit* on me on *Wednesday* last,—
 You *spurn'd* me *such* a day;—another time
 You call'd me *Dog*,—and for these *courtesies*
I'll lend you thus much monies.

Thus taunted, Antonio with great bitterness
 says—

I am as like to call thee so again,
 To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.
 If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
 As to thy friends, (for when did friendship take
 A breed of barren metal of his friend?)
 But lend it rather to thine enemy;
 Who if he break thou may'st with better face
 Exact the penalty.

This one speech shows the strength of Antonio's own prejudices, and his little forbearance towards the prejudices of others.—He speaks of the *breed of barren metal*; by which it is clear he means *interest of money*: and either intends to scoff at the distinction between brothers and strangers raised by the law of Moses before alluded to, and which Shylock regards as a religious obligation, or he *himself* adopts the *same* distinction, by admitting the justice of putting friends and foes on a different footing,—a doctrine quite at variance with the code of a Christian.

The reply of Shylock is perfectly beautiful—so

beautiful, that judging from the words themselves, without reference to an ultimate design, a hearer would at once proclaim *Shylock* to have been the disciple of *Jesus* uttering a Christian reproof to a descendant of *Barabbas*:—

Shylock. Why, look you, how you storm!
I would be *friends* with you, and have your *love*,
Forget the shames that you have stain'd me with,
Supply your present wants, and take no doit
Of usance for my monies, and you'll not hear me:
This is *kind* I offer.

It seems impossible that any thing can be better conceived or expressed than the above speech. Shakespeare constantly uses the word **KIND** as applied to *kindred* (a whole page of instances might be quoted.)—Antonio, whilst most outrageously violating not only good manners, but common decency, by the adoption of language wounding in the extreme to *Shylock*, has used the words *Friends* and *Enemies*. *Shylock* in his dealings only knows *Brothers* and *Strangers*, and tenders a return of good for evil by offering to forget his wrongs and treat with Antonio as with a *Brother*.

Antonio, This *were* Kindness.

Shylock. This *Kindness* will I show.
Go with me to a Notary, seal me there
Your *single* bond; and, in a MERRY SPORT,
If you *repay* me not,—on such a day—
In such a *place*—such *sum* or *sums* as are
Expressed in the condition—let the *forfeit*

Be nominated for—an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, *to be cut off—and taken*,
In what PART of your body pleaseth me.

Antonio. Content, i'faith; I'll seal to such a bond
And say, there is much *kindness* in the Jew.

Bassanio. You shall not seal to such a bond for me,
I'll rather dwell in my necessity.

Antonio. Why, fear not, man; I will not *forfeit* it,
Within these two months, that's a month before
This bond expires, I do expect return
Of thrice three times the value of this bond.

Shylock. O Father Abraham, what these Christians are,
Whose own hard dealings teach them to suspect
The thoughts of others! Pray you, tell me this—
If he should *break* this day what should I gain
By the *exaction* of the forfeiture?
A pound of man's flesh, taken *from* a man,
Is not so estimable, *profitable* neither
As flesh of muttons, beeves, or goats!—I say
To buy his *favour* I extend this *friendship*;
If he will take it—so—if not—adieu:
And for my love I pray you wrong me not.

Antonio. Yes, Shylock, I'll seal unto this bond.

Shylock. Then meet me forthwith at the Notary's;
Give him direction for this merry bond,
And I will go and purse the ducats straight!
See to my house, left in the fearful guard
Of an unthrifty knave, and—PRESENTLY
I WILL BE WITH YOU. [*Erit Shylock.*

Antonio. Hie thee, gentle Jew:—

'This Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows KIND.

Those who know these speeches merely from
having heard them delivered on the stage, would
find it difficult to catch the author's meaning.
Every Shylock who has held his place in the

London Theatres for the last 50 years has proposed the terms of the bond in a manner, not only at variance with the open professions of Shylock, and the received impressions of Antonio, but also certainly destructive of the accomplishment of Shylock's secret object. Antonio himself would at once have seen the malicious intention; nay, Bassanio, for whose benefit alone the bond was to be given, instead of merely coqueting with his maudling—'Oh I can't suffer you to do this on my account,'—would have been bound to say at once 'I see by this rascal's manner, which is directly at variance with his words, that he seeks your *life*—let us go to some other usurer, and I'll pay a thumping rate of interest.—Your security is known to be as good as that of any man in Venice, it is only a question of *rate* of usance, and my object can afford great liberality.'—[The consummate skill of the Poet has not been done justice to by the Actor.] Shylock is approaching the extreme point of management:—he has paved the way by professing, in deference to Antonio's strong aversion to usury, to treat him *substantially* as a *Brother*:—He says—'Give me your *single* bond,—that is to say, for the single sum I lend you, not *increased* in any way,—but as the form of security for loans usually gives a penalty, and as I cannot, without imputation of violating our law, openly deal

with you except as a *Stranger*, why we *must* have a FORFEITURE;—I therefore, in a *merry sport* and to prove the *spirit* in which I deal, will fix the most ridiculous condition that can well be conceived,—namely, that if—to use the common jargon of the law, *you repay me not—on such a day—in such a place—such sum or sums as are expressed in the condition*—I shall receive in place of my 3000 ducats an equal pound of your fair flesh, with the *advantage* of taking it from what PART of your body pleaseth me, A most *usurious* advantage truly!!—And what says Antonio to this?—Why,—‘Content, i’faith, I enter into the spirit of your design,—and this *is* treating me like a *Brother*, as far as your laws will allow.’ Antonio’s reply to Bassanio is as much as to say, ‘Let him alone,—every man has his own way of *showing* kindness, and this is Shylock’s way.’ Nay, after the objection has been urged by Bassanio, and his maudlin interference exposed and properly rebuked, by Shylock, and when Shylock is no longer present, Antonio says, “Hie thee, *gentle Jew*; this Hebrew will turn *Christian*—He grows *kind*.”

The prompt and conclusive manner in which Shylock silences the objection which might interfere with his purpose, is worthy of admiration: as is the dignity with which he says to Bassanio, ‘If your Christian suspicions of the thoughts of others should still drive him to reject my proffered

friendship, do not in return for my love be mean enough to impute to me improper motives in making the offer.' The effect of this is heightened by Shylock's leaving it to Antonio HIMSELF to *give proper instructions* to the Notary for the MERRY BOND, whilst Shylock goes to pursue the Ducats. The last line spoken by Shylock in this matchless scene, displays the whole state of his feeling:—

“ And presently I will be with you.”

The specious smile to Antonio, blended with the chuckle of inward exultation at the success of the finely-concerted scheme for revenge, are quite conclusive of Shylock's intention to ‘*presently be with them* to COMPLETE the much-desired and very *sportive* bargain.’

This scene closes the first act, and the Author has bestowed on it extraordinary care, that the true character and purpose of Shylock may be fully developed at an early period of the play.—
 { To be eminently successful, a scheme of revenge should not only be deeply laid, but must be smooth and plausible on the surface.—In the management of his device Shylock greatly transcends Iago, and every other character by the same author; not only is the incitement to revenge in itself more stimulating, but it also furnishes more plausible grounds for palliation

of the offence,—if any thing can be said in excuse for the indulgence of so base a passion.

It should be borne in mind that in the days of Elizabeth, England was tight laced in religious bands; and although the Jews did not then endure as much persecution as in the reign of John, still they were then, as now, held up to unmerited obloquy, for no better reason than that which Shylock himself has proclaimed, namely—because they *were* Jews.

The senseless outcry generally raised against them comes with very ill grace from persons professing to be Christians; for not only were the *Doctrines* of our own faith most admirably illustrated by the *practice* of the HEAVENLY BEING who taught them, but were themselves derived from the laws of Moses.—Those laws form the revelation which we hold as sacred, and have furnished the ground-work of our municipal and fiscal codes.—[Shakespeare, therefore, when giving an essay on the *passion* of *revenge*, which the character under consideration was intended to be, has followed the example of his Divine Master, by clothing the *man* with all the delusive impressions which might serve to palliate, if not to justify, his acts.]

The laws of Moses are in themselves beautiful; *cruelty* is *no* where inculcated, nor indeed can the people professing the Jewish faith be justly charged with the practice of that vice; on the

contrary, in the necessary slaughter of their animals, they carefully avoid giving them excess of pain, by extinguishing life with the utmost celerity.—It may then be asked, why Shakespeare has made Shylock seek the death of his enemy? And why by the taking of a pound of flesh?—On the first point,—if the Reader will but have the patience to continue his perusal of these observations, he will find an answer: and on the second,—he may answer himself on the instant, by remembering that *Shylock* is to choose the *part* from which the flesh is to be taken.—And he chooses the part that would instantly cause death without torture—

“Nearest his *heart*—those are the very words.”

ACT II. SCENE V.

THE second scene of Shylock exhibits him with his late servant and his daughter; and in this, as in every other, he has been vilely misrepresented by the actors. The servant (Launcelot) has just engaged with Bassanio, with whom he flatters himself he shall find a better place than with the Jew. To Shylock's good offices he was certainly indebted in *getting* the place, as Bassanio says to him,

Shylock, thy master, spoke with me this day,
And hath preferr'd thee, if it be preferment,
To leave a rich Jew's service, to become
The follower of so poor a Gentleman.

* * * * *

————— *—Give him a Livery*
More guarded than his fellows.

* * * * *

Scene. Before Shylock's House.

Enter SHYLOCK and LAUNCELOT.

Shylock. Well, thou shalt see—thy eyes shall be thy judge,
The difference of old Shylock and Bassanio.—
What, Jessica! Thou shalt not gormandize

As thou hast done with me:—What, Jessica!—
And sleep and snore, and rend apparel out:—
Why, Jessica, I say!

Enter JESSICA.

Jessica. Call you? what is your will?

Shylock. I am bid forth to supper, Jessica;
There are my keys:—but wherefore should I go?
I am not bid for *love*—they *flatter* me.
But yet I'll go in *hate*, to feed upon
The *prodigal* Christian. Jessica, my girl,
Look to my house:—I am right loath to go;
There is some ill a brewing to my rest,
For I did *dream* of money-bags to-night.

* * * * *

————— By Jacob's staff, I swear
I have no mind of feasting forth to-night:
But I will go.—Go you before, sirrah;
Say I will come.

Launcelot. I will go before, Sir.—
Mistress, look out of the window for all this;
There will come a Christian by,
Will be worth a Jewess' eye.

[*Exit LAUNCELOT.*]

Shylock. What says the fool of *Hagar's Offspring*, ha?

Jessica. His words were—Farewell, Mistress: nothing
else.

Shylock. The Patch was *kind* enough, but a *huge feeder*,
Snail slow in profit, and he sleeps by *day*
More than the wild cat; drones hive not with me,
Therefore I part with him; and part with him
To one that I would have him help to *waste*
His *borrow'd* purse.—Well, Jessica, go in;
Perhaps I will return immediately;
Do as I bid you,

Shut doors after you; fast bind, fast find,
A proverb never stale in *thrifty* mind.

There is nothing of acerbity in this scene towards Launcelot nor Jessica—he is kind to each, and both betray him. Still every word is consistent. He has now a much stronger inducement to *go forth*, than he had to *dine* with *Antonio*,—he goes to help to *waste* the *borrowed* money—to *aid* the profligacy of the *prodigal*,—that he may thereby be the less able to furnish at maturity, the three thousand ducats, for which *Antonio* is now BOUND. Every feeling is sacrificed to the prosecution of his main design. Shylock's faith in dreams glances exquisitely at the dreams of Jacob and Joseph, and at the expositions of those types of waking thoughts given by many of the Jewish prophets. The allusion to HAGAR'S *offspring* is very appropriate to the departure of his servant; Hagar having been *bondswoman* to Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and having quitted her, as Launcelot does Shylock, under the supposed grievance of too little indulgence. (Genesis, chap. xvi.)

ACT III. SCENE I.

THE third scene of Shylock^x seems to have been considered by the actors as the most difficult of any in the play, merely because it is thought to require the exercise of a superior degree of physical force; as if violence were the test of strength, and noise bespoke intensity of passion. An attentive reader would at once declare it to be the most easy of any, although probably the most productive of applause to the actor.

*The change of
voice—*

The general bearing of Shylock throughout this scene *could not* be mistaken, as the author himself has described how it should be acted. The more delicate and masterly allusions which it contains have, however, been overlooked in the representation. Jessica, the daughter of Shylock, has eloped with a Christian, robbing her father of gold and jewels. Salanio and Salarino say—

The villain Jew with outcries raised the Duke,
And went with him to search Bassanio's ship;
I never heard a passion so confus'd,
So strange, outrageous, and so variable,
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets,—
My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!

Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
Justice! the law! my ducats! and my daughter!

* * * * *

Salanio, Now what news on the Rialto?

Salarino. Why, yet it lives there, uncheck'd, that Antonio

Hath a ship of rich lading wrecked on the narrow seas.—
I would it might prove the end of his losses.

Enter SHYLOCK.

Shylock.—You *knew*, none so well as you, of my daughter's flight.

Salarino.—That's certain; I for my part knew the tailor that made the wings she flew withal.

[This brutal speech of Salarino's (the boon companion of Bassanio and Antonio) provokes no retort from the suffering Jew, who in great grief, and with a humiliated spirit, says:—]

Shylock.—My own flesh and blood to rebel!

Salanio.—Out upon it, old Carrion; rebels it at these years?

Shylock.—I say my daughter is my flesh and blood!

Salarino.—There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory; more between your bloods than there is between red wine and rhenish.—But tell us, do you hear whether Antonio have had any loss at sea or no?

Shylock.—There I have another bad match; a *Bankrupt!* a Prodigal who dare scarce show his head in the Rialto: a beggar that used to come so *snug* upon the Mart. Let him look to his bond—He was wont to call me *USURER*.—Let him—look—to—his *bond*.—He was wont to lend money for a *Christian courtesy*.—Let him look to his *bond*.

Salarino.—Why I'm sure if he *forfeit*, thou wilt not take his flesh; what's *that* good for?

Shylock.—To bait fish withal: if it will *feed* nothing *else*, it will feed *my revenge*. He has disgraced me and hindered me of half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, *scorned my nation!* thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated my enemies; and what is his reason?—*I am a Jew!*—Hath not a Jew eyes?—hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, *passions?* Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a *Christian* is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us do we not die! and if you wrong us, shall we not *revenge?* If we are like you in the *rest* we will resemble you in *that*. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility?—*revenge!* If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be, by Christian *example?* why, *revenge!* The villany you *teach* me I will *execute*,—and, it shall go hard but I will *better* your instructions.

Enter a SERVANT.

Servant.—Gentlemen, my master Antonio is at his house, and desires to speak with you both.

Salarino.—We have been up and down to seek him.

Enter TUBAL.

Salanio.—Here comes another of the tribe; a third cannot be matched, unless the devil himself turn Jew.

[*Exeunt Salanio, Salarino,
and Servant.*]

Shylock.—How now, Tubal. What news from *Genoa?* hast thou found *my daughter?*

Tubal.—I often came where I did hear of her, but cannot find her.

Shylock.—Why, there, there, there, there! a diamond gone, cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort! The *curse*

never fell on *our nation* till now; I never *felt* it till now:—
Two thousand ducats in *that*;—and *other* precious, precious
jewels;—I would my daughter were *dead* at my *foot*, and
the jewels in her ear! Would she were *hears'd* at my foot
and the ducats in her coffin. No news of them? Why,
—so:—and I know not *what* spent in the search.—Why
thou loss *upon* loss! the *thief* gone with so much,—and so
much to *find* the thief;—and no satisfaction, no *revenge*:
nor no ill luck stirring but what lights o' my shoulders; no
sighs but of my heaving, no *tears* but of my shedding.

This is certainly a touching speech,—exhibiting
the feelings of an old man tossed about between
the loss of wealth, and the loss of the Being who
ought to have been the prop of his age,—the in-
juries being rendered doubly acute from the fact
of the *daughter* being the *thief*. A protracted
display of his misery would have been tedious to
the audience, Shakespeare therefore, with admir-
able skill, diverts Shylock's thoughts; and hence-
forth, during the scene, *revenge* and tenderness
alternate in his mind.

Tubal.—Yes, other men have ill luck too; Antonio, as I
heard at Genoa—

Shylock.—What, what, what,—*ill* luck, *ill* luck?

Tubal.—hath an argosy cast away coming from Tripolis.

Shylock.—I thank God, I thank God: Is it true? is it
true?

Tubal.—I spoke with some sailors that escaped the wreck.

Shylock. I *thank* thee, good Tubal: *Good* news, *Good*
news, ha! ha! ha!—Where? in Genoa?

Tubal. Your *Daughter* spent in *Genoa* as I heard, one
night four-score ducats.

Shylock. Thou stick'st a *dagger* in me:—I shall never see my gold again: Four-score ducats at a sitting! four-score ducats!

How admirably the train of thought is again diverted to the ducats!

Tubal. There came divers of *Antonio's* CREDITORS in my company to Venice, that swear he cannot choose but break.

Again the thoughts of the distracted man fly off as directed by the last words addressed to him.

Shylock. I am very glad of it: I'll *plague*: I'll TORTURE him, I am *glad* of it.

How exquisitely is the passion of rage here, not only depicted, but, as it were, dissected!—Shylock who would not put a *brute* to unnecessary *pain* in killing him, here, in the overboiling of his rage, and stung to madness by his wrongs,—talks of TORTURING his victim:—This is weak human nature, when it has lost the mastery of passion, and cannot “sway it to the mood of what it likes or loathes.”—The next speech of Tubal again diverts the unhappy father's thoughts to a more tender subject, and calls forth one of the most touching bursts in the play.

Tubal. One of them show'd me a *ring* that he had of your *Daughter* for a *Monkey*.

Shylock. Out upon her! Thou *torturest* ME, Tubal: it was my *Turquoise*: I had of LEAH—when I was a Bachelor—I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.

All the actors in this have snarled at Tubal—and spoken of the Turquoise as a ring, bought by Shylock of some one during his Bachelorship, of so high a money value as to be worth more than the accumulated prices of as many monkeys as would stock a wilderness.—The author intended a very different reading. [In the course of this fine scene, Shylock has been agitated by affection, avarice, rage, and revenge,—now a flood of *tenderness* pours in on him.] It is evident that Leah was his *wife*, the *mother* of the ingrate who has robbed and deserted him—He has scarcely uttered the words ‘I’ll *torture* him,’ in the preceding speech, when as if by a visitation, he is *himself* TORTURED by Tubal. The turquoise, is said to be a precious stone found in the veins of the mountains on the Eastern confines of Persia—indicating, by its change of colour, variations in the *health* of the wearer, and acting as a charm for the promotion of happiness between a married couple. The Poet has chosen the name of *Leah*, evidently because the despised wife of Jacob was so called (Genesis, xxix). With this explanation, the reader will at once see the author’s meaning.—At the mention of the turquoise, the desolate old man thinks of his boyish days in which it was given to him, by the first object of his love, to serve as a charm for their future happiness, and as the means by which she might watch his health:—That wife bore him a daughter,

and they were happy—How altered now is his situation? he is carried away by the recollection, and in a burst of tears and tenderness, declares he would not have parted with it, for all the monkeys in the world.

TUBAL. But *Antonio* is certainly *undone*.

Again poor Shylock is dashed by his well-meaning, but injudicious friend, upon another of the rocks which have wrecked his peace, and he says,

“Nay, that’s true—that’s very true. Go, Tubal, seek me an officer, bespeak him a *fortnight before*; I’ll have the *heart* of him if he forfeit; for were he out of Venice, I can make what merchandize I will—Go, go, Tubal, and meet me at our Synagogue; go, good Tubal—at our Synagogue, Tubal.”

ACT IV. SCENE I.

THE fourth and last, like the three preceding scenes of Shylock, abounds in Scriptural allusions, none of which have ever been noticed on the stage.

The three thousand ducats not having been forthcoming on the day fixed for the payment, the *forfeit* has become the *due* of the bond. And Shylock has sworn to *have* the forfeit. He says, "I have an oath in heaven: shall I lay perjury upon my soul? No, not for Venice." It is certainly repugnant to the feelings of any human being, in the present day, whether Jew or Christian, that a man should seek a justification for an act of atrocity, by alleging, that as he had *sworn* to do it, he was bound to its commission. In a religious point of view, the *contemplation* of the act is nearly as culpable as its performance. It is not intended here to discuss metaphysical distinctions between the will and the power to do wrong. Before an earthly tribunal, man can only be tried by his actions. If it were otherwise, the judge on the bench might be found as guilty as the prisoner at the bar. Dr. Haslam, (whose splendid lectures on the human mind must hand

down his name to posterity as one of the most extraordinary persons that ever lived,) was once asked by an advocate whether a supposed lunatic was of *sound* mind,—to which he replied. “In my opinion, the *Deity* alone can be of *sound* mind; for a being of sound mind would be free from the weaknesses, frailties, infirmities, and vices of human nature.” So Shakespeare, in displaying the passion of revenge in the person of his Jew, has made the *oath* almost an inevitable weakness consequent on, and arising out of his imperfect nature, or, as Haslam would say, his unsound mind, in misconstruing the laws of Moses, which he was enthusiastically bent on obeying.

[It may be well, in this place, to consider the leading influences under which Shylock is represented to have acted. He considers his tribe as the chosen people of God, and would think it an offence to do away with the distinctions which he is taught by the Old Testament were made by the Deity himself in their favour. He justifies the lending money at *interest*, (for usury and interest are used synonymously,) by the command rehearsed in Deuteronomy, xxiii. which says, “Unto a *stranger* thou *mayest* lend upon usury, but unto thy Brother thou shalt *not* lend upon usury.” Some cavillers have remarked on the use of the word *mayest*, in the one case, and the word *shalt* in the other.—A living author, also,

has alleged that the Israelites were mere agriculturalists; whereas, the Egyptians, by travelling as merchants, made a profit on the merchandise bought with the money lent; and *therefore* it was that the Israelites laid usury on them. These nice speculations, however, cannot do away with the broad distinctions every where raised throughout the Old Testament in favour of the chosen people. It seems unnecessary to multiply instances, or many might be quoted; but perhaps the following will suffice. "And if thy *brother* that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee, thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondsman, but as an hired servant and as a sojourner he shall be with thee."—"For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen."—"Both thy bondmen and thy bondmaids which thou shalt have shall be of the Heathens that are round thee; of them shall you buy bondmen and bondmaidens."—

In making his oath, or more strictly speaking, his vow, to devote Antonio, Shylock thinks himself as much justified as he is in laying interest on a stranger. "If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath, to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." (Numbers, xxx. v. 2.)—"Notwithstanding no devoted thing that a man shall devote unto the Lord,

of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord."

"None devoted, which shall be devoted of them, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death." (Leviticus, xxvii. 28, 29.)

The substance of these is rehearsed in Deuteronomy, xxiii. 23.

"That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform, even as a free-will offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the Lord thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth."

To show that Shylock was not singular in his construction of these as binding obligations, the reader may remember what is generally called Jephtha's rash vow. "And Jephtha vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, if thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, then shall it be that whatsoever cometh forth of the door of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. So Jephtha passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them, and the Lord delivered them into his hands. And Jephtha came to Mispah unto his house, and behold his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels, and with dances, and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter,

thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back. And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth.' And after bewailing her virginity among the mountains, "She returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed." (Judges, xi. 30 to 39.) Here, again, the Christian reader must do Shakespeare the justice to remember that he is displaying the odious passion of revenge, in the person of a most enthusiastic Israelite, who would be influenced to devote the life of a stranger, who had deeply wronged him, by the same mistaken zeal which drove Jephtha to sacrifice his innocent and only child, because he had vowed so to devote her. These explanations are necessary, not only to the true developement of the character of Shylock, but that the reader may understand the motives by which he is influenced, and the verbal allusions by which his actions are accompanied.

Scene. A Court of Justice.

THE DUKE, MAGNIFICOS, ANTONIO, BASSANIO, GRATIANO,
SALARINO, AND OTHERS.

Duke. What, is Antonio here?

Antonio. Ready, so please your Grace.

* * * * *

Duke. Go one, and call the Jew into the Court.

Salanio. He's ready at the door: he comes, my Lord.

Enter SHYLOCK.

Duke. Make room, and let him stand before our face.—

Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,
That thou but lead'st this fashion of thy malice
To the last hour of act; and then, 'tis thought,
'Thou'lt show thy mercy, and remorse, more strange,
Than is thy strange apparent cruelty:
And where thou now exactst the penalty,
(Which is a pound of this poor merchant's flesh,)
Thou wilt not not only lose the forfeiture,
But touch'd with human gentleness and love,
Forgive a moiety of the principal:
Glancing an eye of pity on his losses,
That have of late so huddled on his back;
Enough to press a royal merchant down,
And pluck commiseration of his state
From brassy bosoms, and rough hearts of flint,
From stubborn Turks, and Tartars, never trained
To offices of tender courtesy.

We all expect a *gentle* ANSWER, Jew.

Shylock. I have *possess'd* your Grace of what I *purpose*;
And by our holy sabbath have I *sworn*,
To have the due—the *forfeit* of my bond:
If you deny it, let the danger light
Upon your charter, and your city's freedom.
You'll ask me, why I rather choose to have
A weight of carrion flesh, than to receive
Three thousand ducats: I'll *not* ANSWER that,—
But say,—*it is my humour*. Is it *answer'd*?
What if my house be troubled with a rat,
And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats
To have it baned? What, are you *answer'd* yet?
Some men there are, love not a gaping pig;
Some, that are mad, if they behold a cat;

Now, *for your answer*:

As there's no firm *reason* to be render'd,

Why he cannot abide a gaping pig;

Why he, a harmless necessary cat;

So can *I* give no *reason*, nor *I will* not,

More than a lodg'd hate, and a certain loathing.

I bear Antonio, that I follow thus

A losing suit against him. ARE YOU ANSWER'D?

Bassanio. This is no answer, thou unfeeling man,
To excuse the current of thy cruelty.

Shylock. I am not bound to please *thee* with my ANSWER.

The Duke has said, he expects a *gentle* ANSWER,
therefore Shylock plays on the word *answer*.

Bassanio. Do all men *kill* the things they do not *love*?

Shylock. *Hates* any man the thing he would not *kill*?

Bassanio. Every offence is not a hate at *first*.

Shylock. What, would'st thou let the serpent sting thee
twice?

Bassanio. For thy *three* thousand ducats here is *six*.

Shylock. If *every* ducat in *six* thousand ducats

Were in *six* parts, and every part A DUCAT,

I would not *draw* them; *I would have my bond*.

Duke. How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend'ring none?

Shylock. What *judgment* shall I dread, doing no *wrong*?

You have among you many a *purchased* slave,

Which, like your asses, and your dogs, and mules,

You use in abject and in slavish parts,

Because you *bought* them:—Shall I say to you,

Let them be *free*, marry them to your *heirs*!

Why sweat they under *burdens*? let *their* beds

Be made as soft as *yours*, and let their *palates*

Be season'd with *such* viands! You will answer,

The slaves are *ours*: So do *I* answer you:

The pound of flesh, which I demand of him,

Is dearly *bought*, 'tis *mine*, and I will have it:
 If you deny me, fye upon your law!
 There is no force in the decrees of Venice:
 I stand for judgment: ANSWER; shall I have it?

Here Shylock, triumphantly in his turn, calls on the *Duke* to *answer*.

Duke. Upon my power I may dismiss this Court,
 Unless Bellario, a learned doctor,
 Whom I have sent for to determine this,
 Come here to day.

Salarino.—My Lord, here stays without
 A messenger with letters from the doctor,
 New come from Padua.

Duke.—Bring us the letters; call the messenger.

Enter NERISSA, disguised as a lawyer's clerk.

Bassanio, Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?

Shylock.—To cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there.

This last speech is generally spoken with great malice.— It is a mistake so to pronounce it.

Gratiano.—Can no prayers pierce thee?

Shylock.—No, none that thou hast wit enough to make.

Gratiano.—O, be thou damn'd, inexorable dog!

And for thy life let justice be accus'd.

Thou almost mak'st me waver in my faith,

To hold opinion with Pythagoras,

That souls of animals infuse themselves

Into the trunks of men: thy currish spirit

Govern'd a wolf, who, hang'd for human slaughter,

Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,

And, whilst thou lay'st in thy unhallow'd dam,

Infus'd itself in thee; for thy desires

Are wolfish, bloody, starv'd, and ravenous.

Shylock.—Till thou can'st rail the *seal* from off my *bond*,

'Thou but offend'st thy *lungs* to speak so *loud*:
Repair thy wit, good youth, or it will fall
To cureless ruin.—I stand here for law.

Duke.—This letter from Bellario doth commend
A young and learned doctor to our Court:—
Where is he?

Nerissa.—He attendeth here hard by,
To know your answer, whether you'll admit him.

Enter PORTIA, dressed like a doctor of laws.

Duke.—Give me your hand: Came you from old Bellario?

Portia.—I did, my lord.

Duke.—You are welcome: take your place.
Are you acquainted with the difference
That holds this present question in the Court?

Portia.—I am informed thoroughly of the cause.
Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?

Duke.—Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth.

Portia.—Is your name Shylock?

Shylock.—Shylock is my name.

Portia.—Of a strange nature is the suit you follow;
Yet in such rule, that the Venetian law
Cannot impugn you, as you do proceed.—
You stand within his danger, do you not?

(To Antonio.)

Antonio.—Ay, so he says.

Portia.—Do you *confess* the bond?

Antonio.—I do.

Portia.—Then must the Jew be merciful.

Shylock.—On what *compulsion* must I? tell me that.

Portia.—The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
It droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven,
Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd;
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,

The attribute to awe and majesty,
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
 But mercy is above this sceptre'd sway,
 It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
 It is an attribute to God himself;
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's,
 When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
 Though justice be thy plea, consider this,—
 That, in the course of justice, none of us
 Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
 And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
 The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much,
 To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
 Which if thou follow, this strict Court of Venice
 Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.

Shylock. My deeds upon my head! I CRAVE THE LAW,
 The penalty and forfeit of my bond.

It is quite impossible when perusing this scene, to exclude from recollection, what passed before Pilate in the year of our Lord XXXIII.—and it would be utter affectation to deny that Shakespeare has sketched this trial from that sacred model. *My deeds upon my head—I crave the Law*—“His blood be on us and on our children.” “We have a law,” [S^t Matt. xxvii. 25, and S^t John, xix. 7.]

Portia. Is he not able to discharge the money?

Bassanio. Yes, here I tender it for him in the Court;
 Yea, twice the sum: if that will not suffice,
 I will be bound to pay it ten times o'er,
 On forfeit of my hands, my head, my heart:
 If this will not suffice, it must appear
 That malice bears down truth, And I beseech you,
 Wrest once the law to your authority:

To do a great right, do a little wrong;
And curb this cruel devil of his will.

Portia. It must not be; there's no power in Venice
Can alter a decree established:

'Twill be recorded for a precedent;
And many errors, by this example,
Will rush into the state. IT CANNOT BE.

Shylock. A DANIEL come to judgment! yea, a DANIEL!
O wise young judge, how do I honour thee!

Portia. I pray you, let me look upon the bond.

Shylock. Here 'tis, most reverend doctor, here it is.

Portia. Shylock, there's *thrice* thy money offer'd thee.

Shylock. An oath, an OATH, I have an oath in heaven:
Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?

No, not for Venice.

Portia. Why, this bond's forfeit;
And lawfully by this the Jew can claim
A pound of flesh, to be by him cut off
Nearest the merchant's heart:—Be merciful;
Take *thrice* thy money; bid me *tear* the bond.

Shylock. When 'tis paid according to the *tenor*.—
It doth appear you are a worthy judge;
You know *the law*, your exposition here
Hath been most sound: I charge you *by* the law,
Whereof you are a well deserving pillar,
Proceed to judgment: by my soul I swear,
There is no power in the tongue of man
To alter me: I stay here on my bond.

Antonio. Most heartily I do beseech the Court
To give the judgment.

Portia. Why then, thus it is;
You must prepare your bosom for his knife.

Shylock. O noble judge! O excellent young man!

Portia. For the intent and purpose of the law,
Hath full relation to the penalty,
Which here appeareth due upon the bond.

Shylock. 'Tis very true: O wise and upright judge!
How much more elder art thou than thy looks!

Portia. Therefore, lay bare your bosom.

Shylock. Ay, his breast:
So says the bond;——Doth it not, noble judge?——
Nearest his HEART, those are the very words.

Portia. It is so. Are there balance here, to weigh
The flesh.

Shylock. I have them ready.

Portia. Have by some surgeon, *Shylock*, on your charge,
To stop his wounds, lest he do *bleed* to death.

Shylock. *Is it so nominated in the BOND?*

Here again the Actors have misrepresented the author's meaning, by not taking into consideration the Mosaic *law* with respect to *blood* in making OFFERINGS.

Portia.—It is not so express'd; But what of that?
'Twere good you should so much for charity.

Shylock.—I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond.

Portia.—Come, merchant, have you any thing to say?

Antonio.—But little; I am arm'd, and well prepar'd.—
Give me your hand, Bassanio; fare you well!

Grieve not that I am fallen to this for you —

* * * * *

Shylock.—We *trifle* time; Prithee pursue sentence.

Portia.—A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine;
The Court awards it, and the law doth give it.

Shylock.—Most rightful judge!

Portia.—And you must cut this flesh from off his *breast*;
The law allows it, and the Court awards it.

Shylock.—Most learned judge!—A SENTENCE *come, pre-
pare!*

It is quite impossible to describe on paper the

manner in which this *burst* would be given by an Enthusiastic Jew about to offer a sacrifice.

Portia.—Tarry a little;—there is something else,—
This bond doth give thee here no jot of *blood*!
The words expressly are, a pound of flesh:
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;
But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
One drop of *Christian* blood, thy lands and goods
Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate
Unto the State of Venice.

Gratiano.—O upright judge! Mark, Jew; O learned judge!

Shylock.—Is that the law!

Here Shylock has been *caught*—actually *tricked* as he would say—by a *cavil*—an *evasion*.—To cut *flesh* it is said was allowed to him.—But *how* cut it without *blood*? At last it comes out that it is *Christian* blood that he must not shed one drop of. This assertion from the mouth of a *judge* who had previously advised the attendance of a surgeon, “lest he should *bleed* to death,” staggers Shylock, who doubtingly asks—“Is that the law!”

Portia.—————Thyself shalt see the Act:
For, as thou urgest *justice*, be assur'd,
Thou shalt *have* justice, more than thou desir'st.

In this instance Shakespeare himself seems to have been at a loss for words—*Justice*?—Pshaw!—According to the *religious* code of a *Christian*, Shylock's attempt was *murder*, and ought not to have been tolerated for a second; but Shylock acted under a *different* code.—According to the *Christian*

Statute law of Venice the *Act* of Legislature might be against him—but JUSTICE would have declared with Sixtus V. ‘that when contracts are made it is *just* they should be *fulfilled*.’ Nay, Portia, who acted as Sixtus on the particular occasion, has previously delivered a most exquisite speech in *mitigation* of the *justice* of the Jew’s claim.—The legal quibble might be tenable and effectual according to the enactments of Venice, of which as an alien Shylock was ignorant, and to which as a Religionist he did not consider himself amenable, but he is now *taunted* by the word *Justice* by a *Judge*,—and *that* Judge who five minutes before had put on the same word a different and directly opposite construction.

Gratiano.—O learned judge! Mark, Jew;—a learned judge!

Shylock.—I *take* this offer then; *pay* the bond thrice,
And let the Christian go.

Bassanio.————— Here is the money.

Portia.—Soft;
The Jew shall have all *justice*;—soft!—no haste;—
He shall have nothing but the *penalty*.

Gratiano.—O Jew! an upright judge, a learned judge!

Portia.—Therefore, prepare thee to cut off the flesh;
Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less, nor more,
But just a pound of flesh: if thou tak’st more,
Or less, than a just pound,—be it but so much
As makes it light, or heavy, in the substance,
Or the division of the twentieth part
Of one poor scruple; nay, if the scale do turn
But in the estimation of a hair,—

Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.

Gratiano.—A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew!

Now, infidel, I have thee on the hip.

Portia.—Why doth the Jew pause? take thy forfeiture.

Shylock.—Give me my principal, and let me go.

Bassanio. I have it ready for thee; here it is.

Portia. He hath refus'd it in the open court;

He shall have merely justice, and his bond.

Gratiano. A Daniel, still say I; a second Daniel:—

I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.

Shylock. Shall I not have barely my principal?

Portia. Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture,

To be so taken at thy peril, Jew.

Shylock. Why, then the devil give him good of it,

I'll stay no longer question.

Portia. —————Tarry, Jew;

The law hath yet another hold on you.

It is enacted in the laws of Venice,—

If it be prov'd against *an alien*,

That by direct, or indirect attempts,

He seek the life of any *citizen*,

The party, 'gainst the which he doth contrive,

Shall seize one half his goods: the other half

Comes to the privy coffer of the state:

And the offender's life lies in the mercy

Of the Duke only, 'gainst all other voice.

In which predicament, I say, thou stand'st:

For it appears by manifest proceeding,

'That indirectly, and directly too,

'Thou hast contriv'd against the very life

Of the defendant; and thou hast incurr'd

The danger formerly by me rehears'd.

Down, therefore, and beg mercy of the Duke.

Gratiano. Beg, that thou may'st have leave to hang
thyself.

And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,

'Thou hast not left the value of a cord;
Therefore, thou must be hang'd at the state's charge.

Duke.—That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit,
I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it;
For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's;
The other half comes to the general state,
Which humbleness may drive into a fine.

Portia.—Ay, for the state; not for Antonio.

Shylock.—Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that;
You take my house, when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house; you take my life,
When you do take the means whereby I live.

Portia.—What mercy can you render him, Antonio?

Gratiano.—A halter gratis; nothing else; for God's sake.

Antonio.—So please my lord the Duke, and all the Court,
To quit the fine for one half of his goods;
I am content, so he will let me have
The other half in use,—to render it,
Upon his death, *unto the gentleman*
That lately stole his daughter:

Two things provided more,—That, for this favour.

He presently become a Christian;

The other, that he do record a gift,
Here in the Court, of all he dies possess'd
Unto his son Lorenzo, and his daughter.

Duke.—He shall do this, or else I do recant
The pardon, that I late pronounced here.

Portia.—Art thou contented, Jew? what dost thou say?

Shylock.—I am content.

Portia.—Clerk, draw a deed of gift.

Shylock.—I pray you, give me leave to go from hence;
I am not well; send the deed after me,
And I will sign it.

Duke.—Get thee gone, but do it.

Gratiano.—In christening thou shalt have two godfathers:
Had I been judge, thou should'st have had ten more,
To bring thee to the gallows, not the font.

[*Exit Shylock.*

[The conduct of Shylock after his defeat shows great consistency, and, if properly acted, much of true dignity.]—By the trickish construction of the terms, the bond having become a mere nullity—he says, ‘I’ll *take* this offer then, *pay* the money thrice—and *let* the Christian go. [The actors, consistently enough with their own portrait of the character, have made the Jew lay emphasis on the word *thrive*, as if Shylock were griping at *gain* when defeated of *revenge*.] It is no such thing—Bassanio has never offered to pay the money thrice—he says “For thy *three* thousand ducats here are *six*,” and afterwards repeats the same offer by tendering “*twice* the sum,”—nay to be *bound* to pay it “*ten* times o’er.”—If therefore Shylock had condescended to *bargain* he had the option of 6000 ducats in ready money—or Bassanio’s bond for 30,000 ducats—Both these he had refused.—The notion that the money should be paid *thrice*, comes from Portia *the Judge*—who finding the other offers had been declined, tries if *trebling* the sum will tempt the Jew, whom she afterwards endeavours to persuade to take the sum which *the Judge*, and the Judge alone has pronounced to be an equitable compromise. “*Take* thrice thy money, bid me *tear* the bond,”—What Shylock means is this—‘As the Judge is the Expounder of the law, so he has become the Assessor of satisfaction—and as I was before ready to execute the *sentence* he pro-

nounced, so am I now willing to abide by his suggestion of compromise,'—and in this Shylock was *right*, for the Judge knew the law quite as well *before* as *after* he had suggested the compensation; and Shylock's conduct when he was in *ignorance* of the law, ought not to have prejudiced him, when he was informed of it—Shylock was therefore *right* in saying, '*Pay the money thrice, and tear the bond.*'

Finding that he will not be allowed the forfeiture nor the compromise *on the bond*, he says, 'Well, it can't be denied, even though the bond is annulled, that you have had three thousand ducats of my money—pay them to me!' "Give me my principal, and let me go." There is nothing *gripping* in this, it is the plain sense of the thing, arising out of circumstances as they occur. The "unkindest cut of all" comes direct from the mild and unsophisticated Antonio, who is far from returning good for evil, and who seems to have known the *use* of money to the full as well, if not better than the Jew himself; for he stipulates that instead of a moiety of Shylock's property, which if taken *absolutely* would have gone to the *creditors* of Antonio, he will be content with the use of it for his own peculiar benefit during the Jew's life, to stand at his death as Trustee for the gentleman that lately stole his daughter, exacting as the price of so much courtesy that "He presently become a Christian."

On the Duke's pronouncing "He shall do this," Shylock is *quite* struck down. [His ideas are, as it were, paralysed with horror at the thought of turning Christian,—and thenceforth he speaks and acts as if perfectly reckless of what is passing. All the stage tricks of first looking contemptuously at Gratiano, then maliciously at Antonio, and finally grinning to the audience, as he rushes out of the Court, are perfectly foreign to the author's intentions.]

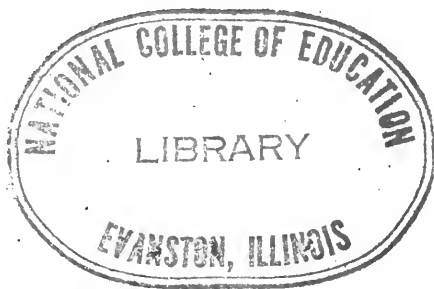
[Throughout the whole of this well-wrought character, there is nothing in word or action to show that Shakespeare intended to mark the Jew for the public execration, which has been so profusely and uncharitably poured out against him. On the contrary, he has clothed him with every attribute which could deprecate censure. His general deportment is dignified, although mixed with the humility derived from a knowledge that sufferance is the badge of a persecuted people. To his servant he is kind,—to his friend, sincere. He is affectionate to his daughter, and cherishes the memory of a much-loved wife. He displays very quick perception of the remarks of others, and a great store of knowledge in his own conversation. With all these qualities he is still, as Haslam says, not free from the weaknesses and infirmities of poor human nature; and having suffered, in his aged person, the indignities of being kicked and spit upon, by a man who knew

that by the law he might kick and spit on a Jew with impunity, in a moment of human depravity he vows to sacrifice his persecutor; and having registered his offering by an oath in Heaven, he with the mistaken zeal of an Enthusiast, considers that "he must do according to that which has proceeded out of his mouth, and according to the vow which he had vowed."]

April 11
1892

a most confused medley of truisms

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